

Open Pollinated Garden Seed as an Alternative Crop:

A Demonstration and Outreach Project

Location of Project: Mineral, Virginia (Southern Region)

Purpose: The growers at Acorn Farm purchased Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (SESE) in 1999, with the intent of diversifying the farm from a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation to a seed production farm. The opportunity to explore the rebirth of regional seed growing as a viable source of income in the Southern region offered some excitement and hope to local growers.

Accomplishments: During the 2000 growing season, 30 different varieties of vegetables, 12 different varieties of flowers, and 8 different varieties of herbs were grown. Most of the varieties were offered in the 2001 SESE retail seed catalog, along with 13 organically certified seeds. Much of the 2000 spring season was spent identifying potential growers within the area by mass mailing and distributing flyers. Over 400 people received invitations to become growers for SESE, 150 of whom were local organic growers. Many local farmers, market growers, and backyard gardeners called to find out more

information about growing for SESE, with the result that the organization had to create a waiting list of potential growers.

During the fall of 2000, Acorn Farm held a harvest party and demonstration day to provide a tour of the farm, seed production processes, seed saving techniques, and seed business. Thirty-five people attended the demonstration day, including 15 potential growers. It was hoped that relationships would continue to flourish between Acorn Farms, local growers, and the larger community, so that customers and growers could be educated about the benefits of seeds that are naturally resistant to local diseases and pests.

Lessons Learned: In redirecting Acorn Farms from a CSA operation to a seed production operation, the productivity and income of the farm has increased. Many companies are looking for good sources of locally grown roots as well as seed stock grown with the use of alternative and sustainable agricultural methods.

Conclusion: The results of this project suggest that there are many marketing opportunities that can be attained by producers who focus on producing seeds that directly address local needs. Growing seeds for use in specific geographic regions appears to offer expanded income potential for smaller-scale agricultural producers. This area of agriculture is quite new,

suggesting that many opportunities remain for educating producers and customers about the benefits of using locally-grown seeds.